

# DUXBURY BEACH



## Duxbury Field Notes

By FAHY BYGATE

It has been looking very Novemberish, lately. This is, I think, the best time of the year to go looking for birds. The beach is empty, the woods are quiet. Most of the trees have lost their leaves (well, not the brown naugahyde leaves of the Red Oaks in my yard). Consequently, the birds are easier to find. This theory may be like the British man who explained that his water pipes were all on the outside of his house so that when they froze and burst they would be easier to get to! But some of our best birds are around in the winter and this is the time to find them.

Last Thursday, Lily the puppy and I found a Merlin sitting on a pole at the beginning of the beach. He was hunting, his fierce eye switching madly from side to side, sizing up a small group of Black-bellied Plovers nearby. The Magician, as we impertinently refer to this bird, is seldom seen sitting still. Hyperactive and clumsy, Merlins are like adolescent boys, causing havoc wherever they go. Thursday, I watched this one scanning our beach until, bored with it all, he took off, hit the accelerator and lit out over the bay, headed for Clark's Island.

Beneparte's Gulls have diminished in numbers lately but there are still a few around to delight us all. These lovely gulls are small and fluttery. They tend to hang out near the bridge, diving in the shallows.

The shorebird population seems to be the usual winter collection of Sanderlings, Black-bellied Plovers and Dunlin. Occasionally, a "peep" will show up but most are out of here by now, lolling on the beaches of Central and South America.

Leaving the beach on Thursday, I found a group of Brant walking about in the sand. Ducks and geese are always funny to watch when they are on land. What grace they have in the water is lost as they waddle to and fro, plucking at bits of vegetation. Brant are small versions of Canada Geese and quite common along the coast of Massachusetts. But things have not always been so. The eelgrass that Brant feed on was severely blighted in 1931. Brant feed exclusively on eelgrass in the winter and when the blight struck, thousands of Brant starved to death. In *The Birds of Massachusetts*, Petersen and Veit explain that reproductive failure may have coincided with the blight leaving the numbers of Brant in Massachusetts at 100 birds or fewer. This was in contrast to the numbers before 1931 of 25,000 to 40,000! Petersen and Veit list Duxbury Bay as a major wintering area for these handsome geese.

Snow Buntings and Horned Larks are decorating the sandy waste places of the beach. You will get your best look at them at the Northern end of the beach in the parking lots or nearby on the road. They seem to like

Duxbury Clipper, Wednesday, November 27, 1996

picking among the gravel or drinking from rain puddles.

Last, and certainly not least, there continues to be a Snowy Owl loafing around the edge of the Bay just before High Pines. This latest bird is quite white and is probably an older male. Whether it is the same bird as I found 3 weeks ago or not, I don't know but it is a beautiful bird.

So, the beach is where it's at and where we should be, too, if we want to take advantage of Duxbury's premier birding spot.